

Universal Periodic Review
(17th session, from 21 October – 1 November 2013)
Contribution of UNESCO

(The countries to be reviewed are, in this order: China, Jordan, Mauritius, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Belize, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Malaysia, Malta, and Monaco. Each submission should refer to one country only)

Saudi Arabia

I. BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

1. Human rights treaties which fall within the competence of UNESCO and international instruments adopted by UNESCO

I.1. Table:

<i>Title</i>	<i>Date of ratification, accession or succession</i>	<i>Declarations /reservations</i>	<i>Recognition of specific competences of treaty bodies</i>	<i>Reference to the rights within UNESCO's fields of competence</i>
Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)	Ratified 17/08/1973	<i>Reservations to this Convention shall not be permitted</i>		Right to education
Convention on Technical and Vocational Education. (1989)	Not state party to this Convention			Right to education
Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)	Acceptance 07/08/1978			Right to take part in cultural life
Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)	Acceptance 10/01/2008			Right to take part in cultural life
Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)	Not state party to this Convention			Right to take part in cultural life

II. Promotion and protection of human rights on the ground

1. Right to education

Normative Framework:

Constitutional framework:

2. Article 13 of the Constitution of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (the “Basic Law of Governance”) adopted on 1st January 1993¹, states that “Education aims at the implantation of the Islamic creed in new generations and the development of their skills so as to enable them to contribute to the building of their society.” According to Article 30, “the state provides public education and pledges to combat illiteracy”

Legislative framework:

3. Issuing the by-laws of the Higher Education Council, under the Royal Decree No M/8 of 17 November 1993, has been a significant development in the field of education. These by-laws include sixty articles covering all administrative and regulatory aspects of higher education.

4. In accordance with the Education Policy Document, it is the duty of the State to provide and spread education at all stages within the existing capacity and resources. In 2004, Royal Decree no. 22646/R² made primary education compulsory for all children aged 6 to 15.³ The goal concerning compulsory education is also fulfilled by adopting the following actions: provision of education to every school aged child; balanced distribution of schools in all populated areas; provision of free transportation to both male and female students; financial assistance to students to motivate them to continue their education; provision of free textbooks to students at all stages. Article 233 of the Educational Policy states that all types of education are free at all stages.

5. Eliminating illiteracy: The Kingdom’s Adult Education and Literacy Law, promulgated by Royal Decree no M/22 (9 Jumada II 1392 AH), obliges the State to eradicate illiteracy among male and female citizens under the age of 45 without charge. It also obliges all government and private organizations to eradicate illiteracy among employees.⁴

6. Royal Decree no. M/54 (29 Shawwal 1425 AH) was promulgated, amending several articles of the Saudi Nationality Law to affirm the principle of equality between men and women

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,NATLEGBOD,,SAU,3ae6b5a44,0.html>

<http://www.shura.gov.sa/wps/wcm/connect/ShuraEn/internet/Laws+and+Regulations/The+Basic+Law+Of+Government/>

² CEDAW Country report, Saudi Arabia - Combined initial and second periodic reports, 40th Session, 2008

³ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Yakin Ertürk – Addendum, Mission to Saudi Arabia, A/HRC/11/6/Add.3, 14 April 2009. Available online at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/11session/A.HRC.11.6.Add.3_en.pdf

⁴ CEDAW Country report, Saudi Arabia - Combined initial and second periodic reports, 40th Session, 2008

in all matters relating to Saudi nationality (to be reviewed with the Ministry of Interior representative).⁵

7. Article 149 of the Labour Law (2005) specifies that women “*shall work in all fields suitable to their nature*”, in accordance with sharia provisions. Employment opportunities for women are mainly in education and health care. Some professions, in particular the legal and judicial professions, are still beyond the reach of women.⁶ They cannot accept jobs in rural areas if no adult male family member can take responsibility for them. Most workplaces are segregated by gender. Contact with a male supervisor or client is allowed by telephone or fax. Women and men work together in some hospitals, and women now broadcast radio news.

Policy measures:⁷

8. In September 2008, Saudi Arabia joined the launch of Education for All: Class of 2015, a new global initiative.⁸

9. Education in the country is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, and the General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training. There are, however, other authorities that provide their affiliates and children with kindergarten, elementary, intermediate, secondary and adult education.

10. The Ministry of Education tends to delegate all operational and administrative responsibilities to the regional and provincial education bodies. Therefore, the Ministry’s headquarters concentrates on the strategic issues, as well as planning and supervising of developmental and promotional activities. This should speed up the process of decision-making and simplify the procedures.⁹

11. The Educational Policy Document, issued by the Council of Ministers Resolution No. 779 of 17 December 1969, has been the basic reference on the fundamental, goals and objectives of education. It is a comprehensive document which emphasizes the right Islamic orientation and provides for extensive scientific and technological developments, with the ultimate objective of promoting human dignity and prosperity. The Educational Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides that education of all types and at all levels shall be free and that the State shall not charge tuition fees (Article 233). Education is financed by the State budget.

⁵ CEDAW Country report, Saudi Arabia - Combined initial and second periodic reports, 40th Session, 2008

⁶ A/HRC/11/6/Add.3, 14 April 2009. In some firms, women have been working as legal clerks or researchers without interacting with clients or going to court.

⁷ See A/HRC/11/6/Add.3, 14 April 2009. Op. Cit.

⁸ EFA - GMR, 2010

⁹ World Data on Education, seventh edition, 2010-11,
http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Saudi_Arabia.pdf

12. The Ten-year Strategic Plan (2004-2014)¹⁰ of the Ministry of Education was approved by the Minister of Education's Decision No.1581/1/5 dated 17 March 2003. The decision stated that the application of the Plan be effective in the year 2004 to coincide with the State's Eighth Development Plan. Within the framework of this plan, education is considered to be the main source for the formation of the human capital which constitutes the essential element in all aspects of economic development, particularly in the achievement of high development economic rates.

13. The Ninth Development Plan 2010-2014¹¹ envisages the creation of an integrated and comprehensive education system that will strive to lay out solid pillars for the public, with the help of well trained and highly qualified education professionals who can develop students' capabilities and help them acquire cognitive and innovative skills. Among the main objectives of the Human Resources Development are General Education, Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Training.

Special needs Education

14. Special needs education services have increased and special education programmes were implemented in the country. Progress was achieved in different areas:

- Audio disability category (38 advanced programme for audio disability were inaugurated all over the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)
- Mental disability category (more than 50 programmes for multi disability students and more than 50 programmes for autism students were open).
- Vision disability category (speech central library with digital IDSEL system were upgraded and developed in the speech library to provide blinded with cultural books and curriculums).
- Education difficulty categories.¹²

Quality education

15. The Government also engaged itself, through a Royal approval, to implement the King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz' Project for the Development of General Education. This project represents a landmark and one of the most essential projects of education qualitative development in the History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. An amount of 9 billion riyals has been allocated for the purpose of:

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<http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Saudi%20Arabia/Saudi%20Arabia%20Education%20Plan%20English%20summary.pdf>

¹¹

<http://www.mep.gov.sa/inetforms/article/Download.jsp;jsessionid=29799FA84079458472D099637FA5BF50.beta?Download.ObjectID=205>

¹² Saudi Arabia: national report. 48th session of the International Conference on Education, ICE: "Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future", Geneva, 25-28 November 2008,

http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2008/saudiarabia_NR08_en.pdf

16. Developing educational curricula in their broad sense in order to keep pace with modern scientific and technological progress and meet educational, academic, occupational, mental, physical, intellectual and livelihood-related needs.

17. Retraining male and female teachers to perform their educational functions in a manner conducive to achievement of the objectives of the updated educational curricula.

18. Enhancing the educational environment and adapting its curricula for the introduction of digital technology.

19. Developing the inherent capacities, skills, creativity, talents and hobbies of students and satisfying their personal aspirations.¹³

Languages in Education

20. In May 2011, the Ministry of Education started preparing an English language curriculum for fourth graders at all government schools for the start of the next academic year. The curriculum includes the teaching of the English alphabet and numbers, in addition to initial applications and practice books. The initial plan will see two classes per week. The language classes will only be for the fourth graders next year. Grade five will be taught the year afterwards. The ministry will request the Council of Ministers to consider English classes for children below the fourth grade, they said. It has to be noted that private schools have been teaching English to children in all their primary classes – from the first to the sixth grades.¹⁴

Gender Equality¹⁵

21. A number of positive developments have taken place affecting the status of women, particularly in access to education, which has resulted in significant improvements in women's literacy rates within a relatively short period of time. Today, women enjoy free and nearly complete access to primary and secondary education. This increase in girls' years of education has had a positive impact on marriage patterns, as shown for instance by an increase in the age of first marriage and a decrease in polygamous practices.¹⁶

22. However, concerns have been raised that the overall aim of girls' education which was to prepare them for their "roles" as mothers and wives has not changed over the past 40 years. Although stereotypes that were perpetuated in some textbooks have recently been removed,¹⁷ at

¹³ Saudi Arabia: national report. 48th session of the International Conference on Education, ICE: "Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future", Geneva, 25-28 November 2008, http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2008/saudiarabia_NR08_en.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2011050599924> (Access 16/9/11)

¹⁵ http://www.ei-ie.org/barometer/en/profiles_detail.php?country=saudiarabia

¹⁶ A/HRC/11/6/Add.3, 14 April 2009. Available online at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/11session/A.HRC.11.6.Add.3_en.pdf See also: 2000 Demographic Survey.

¹⁷ Responses to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/SAU/Q/2/Add.1, para. 21)

secondary and tertiary levels of education, girls specialize in humanities and arts rather than science and engineering courses. They also remain excluded from some fields of study, and sex-segregated education impacts on the quality of education as the allocation of resources and access are said to be unequally distributed.

23. Nonetheless, the achievements in girls' education have been commendable. However, this has not been accompanied by a comparable increase in women's participation in the labour force and they are largely excluded from decision-making processes.

24. Women are subject to greater restrictions than men regarding marriage to non-citizens and to non-Muslims. Men may divorce without cause, but women must show cause. A Muslim woman may keep her children until age 7 for boys and age 9 for girls, but beyond these ages their custody goes to her husband or her deceased husband's family.

25. Women have access to free but segregated education through the university level. More than 58% of university students are women, but there are areas of study that they are not permitted to enter. Men may study overseas. Women doing so should be accompanied by a male relative, but many women now study overseas without a guardian.

26. Women's low participation in the workforce is attributed to the mismatch between educational outputs and employment opportunities, women's lack of freedom of movement and restrictions emanating from the guardianship system.¹⁸

27. Article 149 of the Labour Law (2005) specifies that women "*shall work in all fields suitable to their nature*", in accordance with sharia provisions. Employment opportunities for women are mainly in education and health care. Some professions, in particular the legal and judicial professions, are still beyond the reach of women.¹⁹ They cannot accept jobs in rural areas if no adult male family member can take responsibility for them. Most workplaces are segregated by gender. Contact with a male supervisor or client is allowed by telephone or fax. Women and men work together in some hospitals, and women now broadcast radio news.

Prison's schools

28. A project in Saudi Arabia aims to activate the prisons schools and eliminate any barriers, which preclude prisoners to continue their study and urge them to complete their suspended study course during prison period. The main objectives are the following:

- enhance the prison school situation and activate its educational role
- eliminate barriers and obstacles that challenge prisoners' study
- create and provide various activities and programmes that lead to prisoners' reformation
- provide prisoners with education and illiteracy control.

¹⁸ A/HRC/11/6/Add.3, 14 April 2009

¹⁹ A/HRC/11/6/Add.3, 14 April 2009. In some firms, women have been working as legal clerks or researchers without interacting with clients or going to court.

29. Prisoner's classes and schools were inaugurated all over the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia prisons.²⁰

Cooperation:

30. Saudi Arabia is party to UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) since 1973 but did not report to UNESCO within the framework of the seventh consultation of Member States on the measures taken for its implementation (covering the period 2000-2005).

31. Saudi Arabia is not party to UNESCO's Convention on Technical and Vocational Education (1989).

32. Saudi Arabia did not report within the framework of the fourth consultation of Member States on the measures taken for the implementation of the UNESCO's Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1974) (covering the period 2005-2008).

Freedom of opinion and expression

Achievements, best practices, challenges and constraints

Legislative framework

33. The 1992 Basic Law of Saudi Arabia provides no explicit principle about freedom of expression. The Press and Publication Act 2000 (amended 2011) continues to contain provisions that penalize media outlets with high fines and closure for publishing any materials that damage the reputation of the country's grand mufti, members of the Council of Senior Religious Scholars and government officials.

34. A Freedom of information law has not been introduced in Saudi Arabia.

35. Blasphemy is considered as a criminal offence punishable by death. Websites critical of the government or considered sensitive are often blocked.

Media self-regulation

36. Media self-regulatory mechanisms are not developed in Saudi Arabia.

Safety of journalists

37. UNESCO recorded no killings of journalists in Saudi Arabia from 2008 to 2012. However, according to local, regional, and international organizations, journalists continue to face possibility of prison terms for their work and are subject to high level of censorship.

²⁰ Saudi Arabia: national report. 48th session of the International Conference on Education, ICE: "Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future", Geneva, 25-28 November 2008, http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2008/saudiarabia_NR08_en.pdf

The right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications (REBSP)

Cooperation: Achievements, best practices, challenges and constraints:

38. The expert from Saudi Arabia is member of the permanent International Bioethics Committee (IBC) of UNESCO, an advisory body concerning the follow-up to the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005), and the International Declaration on Human Genetic Data (2003).

39. The Fifth Development Plan (1410-1415 AH: 1990-1995) required the Kingdom's industry in both the public and private sector to concentrate on improving efficiency and competitiveness. In achieving these goals, the application of the latest scientific developments and the most advanced technology clearly had a major role.²¹

40. Established in Riyadh in 1977 (1397 H), King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology is an independent scientific organization, administratively attached to the Prime Minister (the King). It is run by a higher committee chaired by the King. The Crown Prince and First Deputy Premier deputize for the King. The committee's members are the Second Deputy Premier and a number of ministers and ulema. Its objectives are:

- i) The proposal of a national policy for the advancement of science and technology. It lays down the required strategy to achieve this end.
- ii) The execution of scientific research programs for development in the Kingdom.
- iii) The fostering of the private sector to develop agricultural and industrial research.
- iv) The enhancement of various research programs between the Kingdom and international scientific institutions for the purpose of keeping abreast of scientific advances, whether through scholarships or joint research.
- v) The offering of scholarships and training courses in the field of scientific research. It also awards scholarships to individuals and establishments to conduct applied scientific research.
- vi) The coordination with governmental organs, scientific institutions and research centers in the Kingdom for the purpose of research and data exchange.²²

Right to take part in cultural life

Normative Framework: constitutional and legislative frameworks

41. The Basic Law of governance provides that the state protects human rights in accordance with the Islamic Shari'ah and safeguards science, literature and culture; it encourages scientific

²¹ <http://www.saudinf.com/main/j48.htm>

²² <http://the-saudi.net/saudi-arabia/kacst.htm>

research; it protects the Islamic and Arab heritage and contributes toward the Arab, Islamic and human civilization.²³

Institutional framework

42. A variety of institutions have been established throughout the Kingdom to preserve Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage. One of the largest is the Department of Culture at the Ministry of Culture and Information, which sponsors a wide range of cultural programs, including literary and drama clubs, folklore classes, library events, arts and crafts as well as science projects. The Department of Culture regularly sponsors exhibitions, literary readings and symposia at its regional offices as well as its Riyadh headquarters. It also sponsors Saudis to participate in international art and cultural events, including poetry and essay competitions as well as exhibits of calligraphy and artwork. The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts, founded in 1972, sponsors Saudi artists and provides ways for new talents to develop and display their art. The Department of Museums and Antiquities was established in 1974. Today, there are major museums in each of the Kingdom's 13 provinces, as well many small privately owned ones throughout the country.²⁴

Work with civil society

43. In Saudi Arabia, although there are hundreds of civil society organizations working in various fields, the vast majority of Saudi NGOs are government-affiliated, and there are few if any independent organizations. Civil society remains underdeveloped, due in large part to a restrictive legal framework, a lack of transparency in NGO operations, and a lack of expertise in establishing effective and sustainable institutions. This environment exists despite Saudi society's cultural and social heritage, and religious laws that call for civic work in various spheres. Recently, Saudi Arabian society has seen an unprecedented increase in demand for civic rights. In response to these demands, the Saudi Ministry of Social Affairs proposed in 2006 a draft *Law on Associations and Foundations*. This law was revised and published by the Shura Council on 31 December 2007.²⁵

Right to take part in cultural life

Achievements, challenges, best practices and constraints related to the implementation of the right to take part in cultural life

44. *Normative Framework: constitutional and legislative frameworks:* The Basic Law of governance provides that the state protects human rights in accordance with the Islamic Shari'ah and safeguards science, literature and culture; it encourages scientific research; it protects the Islamic and Arab heritage and contributes toward the Arab, Islamic and human civilization.

²³ Extracts from

²⁴ Extracts from http://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/culture_art/cultural_institutions.aspx; January 30, 2013.

²⁵ Extracts from <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/saudi-arabia.html>, January 30, 2013.

45. *Institutional framework:* A variety of institutions have been established throughout the Kingdom to preserve Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage. One of the largest is the Department of Culture at the Ministry of Culture and Information, which sponsors a wide range of cultural programs, including literary and drama clubs, folklore classes, library events, arts and crafts as well as science projects. The Department of Culture regularly sponsors exhibitions, literary readings and symposia at its regional offices as well as its Riyadh headquarters. It also sponsors Saudis to participate in international art and cultural events, including poetry and essay competitions as well as exhibits of calligraphy and artwork. The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts, founded in 1972, sponsors Saudi artists and provides ways for new talents to develop and display their art. The Department of Museums and Antiquities was established in 1974. Today, there are major museums in each of the Kingdom's 13 provinces, as well many small privately owned ones throughout the country.²⁶

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III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Right to education

47. Saudi Arabia is encouraged to take further legislative measures, prohibiting discrimination in education in accordance with the minimum standards outlined in Article 1, paragraph 1(a-d) in UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960).

48. Saudi Arabia is encouraged to adopt further measures (e.g. special laws) which aim to combat discrimination in education, protect minority groups, and promote gender equality in education, reflecting their international commitment under the Convention against Discrimination in Education.

49. UNESCO has launched the 8th Consultation on the measures taken for the implementation of the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education (covering the period 2006-2011), the results of this Consultation will be submitted to UNESCO's governing bodies at the end of 2013. Saudi Arabia is party to UNESCO's Convention against

²⁶ Extracts from http://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/culture_art/cultural_institutions.aspx; January 30, 2013.

²⁷ Extracts from <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/saudiarabia.html>, January 30, 2013.

Discrimination in Education and is, according to Article 7 of the Convention, obligated to report to UNESCO on “the legislative and administrative provisions they have adopted and other actions which they have taken for the application of this Convention”. Saudi Arabia is encouraged to submit a report on the measures taken for the implementation of the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education.

50. Saudi Arabia is encouraged to further elaborate provisions in its legislation and/or report on the justiciability of the right to education in order to increase the potential for the right to education to be respected, protected, fulfilled and monitored.

51. Saudi Arabia is encouraged to ensure that every area of study on higher education is accessible to women on the same basis as men.

Freedom of opinion and expression

52. The Government is encouraged to introduce a freedom of information law that is in accordance with international standards.

53. The Government is encouraged to decriminalize defamation and make it part of the civil code in accordance with international standards.

54. UNESCO recommends developing the media self-regulatory mechanism.

55. The Government is encouraged to review the pre-existing laws pertaining to media and the press, including the The Press and Publication Act 2000, to bring them in line with international standards.

The right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications (REBSP)

56. The Government of Saudi Arabia is encouraged to report to UNESCO within the framework of the on-going consultation with Member States on the monitoring of the implementation and a possible revision of the 1974 Recommendation on the Status of Scientific Researchers.

Right to take part in cultural life

57. The legal and institutional framework that governs the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage would benefit from revision and specific mandates and responsibilities from the different governmental entities would need clarification. Greater resources to reinforce capacities for the implementation of the 2003 Convention and the development of technical skills to safeguard intangible cultural heritage should be allocated.